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OLD SPANISH GIRGONÇA

In the *Libro de Buen Amor*, copla 1610 (ed. Ducamin), Juan Ruiz likens the *mujeres chicas* to small precious stones, and says:

En pequena girgonça yace grand rresplandor.

Cejador, in his edition of the *Libro de Buen Amor*, has the following comment on *girgonça*: "piedra fina. Villena, Cis. 3: Asy como rubi e diamante e girgonça." The *Diccionario de Terreros* (II, 391) defines *jirgonça* as "especie de piedra contra el veneno," and also quotes Villena. Zerolo has a similar explanation.

As will be noted, the definitions given are all vague and do not give any clear idea as to the identity of the stone. In reading Marie de France, *Le Fraisne*, it occurred to me that OSp *girgonça* might be traced to the OFr *jagonce*, which Warnke translates "rubin."¹ Concerning the latter word very copious material can be found in Pannier's *Les lapidaires français*, where the following forms are found: *jagonce*, *jagunce*, *jagonces*, *jacinte*, *jacincte*, *jacynthe*, supposedly derived from the Latin *hyacinthus* through the Greek *ῥάκινθος*. The gender varies. Schuchardt² discusses the word in detail and doubts the etymology suggested by one of A. Thomas' pupils: *hyacinthus* mixed with *Zakynthus*.³ He admits, however, the possibility of a contamination of *hyacinthus*, -ia, with OFr *jargon*, from Ital. *giargone* (compared in the *Dictionnaire Général* with OFr *jagonce*, *jargonce*). He traces the word from the Greek *ῥάκινθος* to the Syriac *yāquntā* (*yākundā*), and believes that the Syrians, who traded with France in Merovingian times, first brought the stone to the country. According to Schuchardt, it seems plausible that the OFr form was derived from the Syriac.

Godefroy, in addition to the forms already mentioned, has the following: *jargunces*, *jacunces*, *jagonses*, *gagonce*. The English word

¹ Karl Warnke, *Die Lais der Marie de France* (Halle, 1900), p. 59.

² *Zeits. für rom. Phil.*, XXVI, 398, 589, and XXVIII, 146. The following forms are quoted: MHG *iāchant*, *iachant*, Russ. ЯХОУТЪ, Arab. *yāqūt*, Mod. Pers. *yākand*, Old Armen. *yakunf*, Georg. *iagunda*.

³ Modern Zante: Old Greek *Zakynthos*, the island opposite the bay of Corinth; cf. also *Saguntum*, now Murviedro in Spain, said to have been founded by Greeks from *Zakynthos*.

jargon, or *jargoon*, is defined in Murray's *New English Dictionary* as "a translucent, colourless or smoky variety of the mineral *zircon*, a silicate of *zirconia*, found in Ceylon." Murray also refers to the Ptg. *zarcão*, Arab. *zarqûn*, from the Persian *zar-gûn* = gold-colored.

The *Lapidaire de Marbode* mentions three varieties:

L'une est granate, altre citrine,
L'autre evage,

and according to their color they have different magic properties:

Tutes confortent par vigur,
Vains pensers toilent e tristur.

The best of all is claimed to be the bright red one, called the *jagonce grenas* (also *sarde*, *jagonce granas de sarde*, *jagonce balais*). As to the various magic or protecting qualities of this stone, compare Pannier's work (pp. 79, 125, 242, 280, 292).

Professor K. Pietsch called my attention to the *Lapidario de Alfonso el Sabio*, compiled in 1250, and to Don Juan Manuel's *El libro del Cauallero et del Escudero*,¹ written about 1326. In the first, three varieties of *iargonça* are mentioned: *vermeia*, *amariella*, and *blanca*, and their magic properties are described at length. The second mentions the word in the following passage: "las preciosas [i.e., piedras] son asi commo carbunculos et Rubis et diamantes et esmeraldas et balaxes et prasma et çaphires et çardeñas et *girgonzas* et estopazas et aljofares et torquesas et calçadonias et cristales et otras piedras que fallan en las animalias." The *Lapidario* also mentions *yacoth*, of which it says: "De la tercera faz del signo cancro: es la piedra que a nombre en arauigo *yacoth alaazfor* et en latin *iargonça amariella* et algunos le dixieron otrossi *safir chitrino*."

To sum up:

1. *Girgonça* (*iargonça*) belongs to the group of precious stones which are silicates of *zirconia* (also spelled *circonia*, *jargon*), and are of various colors, mostly white, yellow, and red, the last variety being considered the best of all and generally called *hyacinth* or *jacinth*. The variety known as *jargon* (*jargoon*) is of yellow, green, or brown color, but never red.²

¹ *Romanische Forschungen*, VII, 513.

² Cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. Meyer's *Konversations Lexikon*: "Ist farblos, selten weiss und wasserhell, meist hyazinthrot (hyacinth) oder bräunlich, auch gelb oder grün, glasglänzend. Die hyazinthroten Varietäten sind geschätzte Edelsteine; die blassgelben und farblosen, auch die künstlich durch Erhitzen entfärbten kommen als Maturadiamanten oder Jargon de Ceylan in den Handel."

2. It was probably first imported from the East, though it is also found in the alluvial sands in the Ural, in Norway, in Bohemia, in France, in Italy, in Australia, and in the United States.¹ In Pannier's work (p. 280), the country of its origin is mentioned three times:

Que on entre deus mers la trueve,
En l'isle qui a non Chorynthe²
La est apelée jacynte.
A coulour de ruby retrait ...
Pres d'Ethyope est cele terre
Ou on vait cele pierre querre.

3. It is the same variety of stone as the OFr *jagonce*, and has the same protective qualities. In the lay of *Le Fraisne* (ll. 127 ff.) the ring containing the stone is to protect a child from harm:

A une piece d'un suen laz
un gros anel li lie al braz.
De fin or i aveit une unce;
el chastun out une jagunce;
la verge entour esteit letree.

The *Lapidaire de Berne* says (p. 126):

En jacinthe ha riche juiel,
Bien est digne d'estre en anel
Quar cil qui le porte sor soi
Pendue au col ou en son doi
Seürs puet estre, ce m'est vis,
Par la terre et par le païs:
Pestilance et corrupcion
Ne autre tribulacion
Ne li nuist por terre changier
Ne por son païs estrangier.

According to the *Lapidario*, 96 v.:

Et su uertud es atal que el que la troxiere consigo sera bien andant en mar: et en çaça de bestias.

The *Dictionnaire Infernal* of J. Collin de Plancy (p. 279) says of the *hyacinthe*: "pierre précieuse que l'on pendait au cou pour se

¹ Cf. *New International Encyclopedia*, article "Zircon." The etymology given there is as follows: From Arab. *zarkûn* (cinnabar, vermilion), Pers. *zargûn* (golden, yellow, from: *zar*, Skrt. *hirānya*=gold, and *gûn*, Avestan *gaona*=color).

² Here possibly an allusion is made to Zante (Zakynthos), opposite the Bay of Corinth, formerly a considerable trade center for jewels.

défendre de la peste. De plus elle fortifiait le coeur, garantissait de la foudre, et augmentait les richesses et les honneurs."

4. It is *not* a "ruby," as Warnke and others translate it.¹ It will be noted that all the references quoted make a clear distinction between *jagonce*, *iargonça* and the ruby, which the *Lapidario* calls *robi*. The archpriest mentions ruby as evidently a different stone, in copla 1613: "*Como rroby pequenno tyene mucha bondad.*"

5. The etymology of the French and Spanish word is rather to be sought in the Greek *ῥάκυθος*, possibly through the Syrian variant *yāquntā* and contamination with *giargone*, as Schuchardt suggests, than in the Arab. *zarqūn* and Pers. *zargūn*. It seems probable that the stone became more widely known in Europe after the Crusades.

6. The OFr word being mentioned in the *Chanson de Roland* (ca. 1110) and in Marie's *Lais* (ca. 1160), it seems to be older than the Spanish *iargonça*, the earliest instance of which appears to be the *Lapidario* (1250). It would, therefore, seem plausible to assume that it passed from French into Spanish.

What color had the archpriest in mind? In another passage (copla 1387) he speaks of a shining *çafir* being found by a cock, and inasmuch as the yellow variety of *iargonça* was also called *safir chitrino* it may be that he means the same stone. From the attribute "grand rresplandor" we might infer that he means the white, diamond-like variety. Personally I am inclined to think that he means the bright red one, first, because he likens it to *mujeres chicas*, whose red cheeks and lips he likes so well, and second, because this variety was considered to be the most precious of all *girgonças*.

ALOIS RICHARD NYKL

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

¹ Eugene Mason in his translation of *Le Fraisne* (*French Medieval Romances*, p. 93) uses the more nearly correct term "garnet." With regard to Arab. *yāqūt* and Mod. Pers. *yāgand*, Professor Sprengling informs me that it may at times very well be ruby, red sapphire, etc. (In the *aljamiado* texts, *al-yaquta* is used to designate this variety of stone.) He believes that the Arabic word is derived from the Persian, and the latter may well be derived from the Aramaic (resp. Syriac).